

40 Community resolution urges EPA funding

Special to The Montanian
By Gayla Benefield

A "Libby and Lincoln County Community Resolution" addressing the issues of local asbestos cleanup and the desire for an asbestos-related disease (ARD) research center in Libby has been released for community members' signatures by the Center for Asbestos Related Disease (CARD) and the Community Advisory Group.

The resolution articulates the desire of the community to come together to speak with one voice about the community's reaction to the recent announcement of cutbacks in Environmental Protection Agency funding that would impact the cleanup efforts already underway for contaminated homes, businesses and lands in Libby.

The EPA's announcement of decreased funding on Jan. 7, 2004, means significantly prolonging the EPA asbestos cleanup in Libby and Troy. Local residents fear this funding shortfall will further undermine efforts to counteract the stigma of the community's Superfund designation. Libby, and the surrounding 22-mile radius, which includes the city of Troy, was designated by Gov. Judy Martz as Montana's one-time "silver bullet" Superfund site, and placed on the EPA National Priorities List on Oct. 18, 2002.

This designation carried with it the promise of EPA's then-director Christy Todd Whitman of a prompt and thorough cleanup. On Sept. 12, 2001, Gov. Martz said it's up to people like herself, Ms. Whitman and Montana's delegates in Washington to take responsibility

The resolution is now available for signatures at the front desk of the CARD Clinic, 308 Louisiana Ave. Libby, 8-11 a.m. and 1-5 p.m., Monday through Thursday

to do what's right for Libby.

"The people of Libby should not be treated as a political football," Mrs. Martz said.

In a Jan. 9, 2004, newspaper article, Ted Monosco, Lee Washington Bureau, wrote, "Sen. Max Baucus, D-Mont., who as a member of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, helped write the law authorizing the Superfund program would like to see the tax re-authorized. 'Max is going to fight for funding for Libby ... no matter what, but he is also going to push to get Superfund re-authorized so we have a stable source of funding,' Baucus spokesman Barrett Kaiser said."

Libby has also been suggested as a logical site for an asbestos-related disease research center. The CARD board and staff, along with the Committee for Asbestos Related Research (CFARR) national advisory group, trying to determine the feasibility of such a facility and research objectives for a research center. The resolution addresses the desire for the research center to be located in Libby.

The resolution idea, which originated at the Libby Community Advisory Group (CAG), became a joint effort between the CAG, the CARD and the Technical Assis-

tance Group (TAG). The concept was presented to the Asbestos Related Disease Network (ARD Network), a network of healthcare providers in Libby that communicates and collaborates on ARD issues. A draft resolution was circulated among many community organizations and individuals for additional comments and suggestions.

The final version of the resolution is now available for signatures at the front desk of the CARD Clinic, 308 Louisiana Ave., from 8-11 a.m. and 1-5 p.m., Monday through Thursday. The full text of the resolutions is available online at <http://www.libbycard.org>.

Elected officials, area organizations, businesses and individuals from throughout Lincoln County are encouraged to go to the CARD Clinic and sign the resolution.

In addition to the community resolution, members of the CAG are mounting a letter-writing campaign for people to express their own concerns about the reduced EPA funding for Libby and Troy cleanup.

Letters can be dropped off at Timberline Auto Center, 617 Mineral Ave. in Libby. A request for letters has already been distributed through the public schools. Plans are underway to present the signed resolution and a "bushel basket" full of letters to EPA Administrator Mike Leavitt to show how committed this community is to holding the EPA accountable for funding for asbestos cleanup. Mr. Leavitt may visit Libby early in 2004.

"This community effort for the resolution and the letter-writing en-

deavor underscores local support for the need for funding as promised for the timely cleanup," said CARD board president Mike Giesey.

Brad Black, M.D., the Lincoln County health officer, said, "Because asbestos-related disease has affected the entire community,

health issues, environmental degradation, economic loss and long-term exposure that may affect future generations because of the latency of disease symptoms, and it is important that the EPA knows we need the cleanup to progress on

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its original time table to prevent even further exposure," Black said. "Even low-level exposure may pose unknown health consequences. The resolution reflects that the community of Lincoln County stands together in desiring conclusion of the cleanup effort as well as hope for future breakthroughs in treatments, care, and

cures for ARD through the research center."

CARD is an independent non-profit organization committed to the care of patients, through diagnosis, treatment, monitoring, and research. Additional information about asbestos and ARD can be found at the Asbestos and Libby Health website, <http://www2.umt.edu/Libbyhealth/default.htm>, and at the CARD website at <http://www.libbycard.org>.

(Gayla Benefield is an advocate for victims of asbestos exposure. She lives in Libby)

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